



**Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett**

*Chair*

Welcome to the web site of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). Thank you for visiting us.

As our name suggests, USCIRF is about freedom, in particular religious freedom, which is a pivotal human right and a cornerstone of international law. Inherent in religious freedom is the right to think as we please, believe or not believe as our conscience leads, peacefully practice our beliefs, and express them publicly without fear or intimidation.

Created by Congress as an independent, bipartisan, federal body through the enactment of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA), our Commission uses international standards to monitor religious freedom conditions abroad and recommend policies that will enhance freedom where it is imperiled. Aided by an able staff, my colleagues and I assess, propose, and press for decisive responses to religious freedom violations that range from killing, torture, and detention to less dramatic abuses such as denial of permits to build houses of worship. We seek nothing less than for these concerns to become integrated fully into U.S. foreign policy.

Why is religious freedom important? Along with being a cherished American value and an internationally recognized human right, religious freedom is powerfully connected to a nation's overall well-being. Research finds that religious freedom is associated with vibrant political democracy, rising economic and social progress, diminished violence, and greater stability. In contrast, nations that disrespect basic rights, including religious freedom, provide a breeding ground for insecurity and instability, war and terror, and violent radical movements and activities. Thus, standing up for religious freedom supports international law, advances human rights, and furthers the security and prosperity of the United States and the world.

Today, the stakes for the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief couldn't be higher, and it is imperative that the Commission respond to this challenge with every tool at its disposal in every corner of the globe.